

Hydroprogne caspia, Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*, Little Tern *Sterna albigrons*, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* and Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, resting on sand bars and rocks exposed during the low tides. One of the Sandwich Terns had an aluminium ring on its right tarsus.

The Sandwich Terns observed between May and July (Table 1) were probably sub-adults overwintering here. It is known for the European nesting population (Moller 1981) that many first year, some second year and third year birds spend the summer in their winter quarters in Africa, the birds maturing and breeding first only at the age of four years.

At Diu, when we observed the birds in summer, they were among a few thousand other terns, namely, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, a majority of which were juveniles and some adults in winter plumage, Caspian

Tern, Whiskered Tern and Gullbilled Tern in winter plumage and Little Tern in summer plumage. This observation indicates that the Diu creek may be important for overwintering Laridae.

Repeated sighting of the Sandwich Tern in Gujarat strengthens the view that the bird is a more frequent visitor along the coast of western India than what the earlier scant records indicate.

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14. A NOTE ON THE FIRST DISCOVERY OF THE NEST AND EGGS OF THE ASHY-HEADED BABBLER *GARRULAX CINEREIFRONS*, AN ENDEMIC SPECIES OF SRI LANKA, IN 1984

According to A HISTORY OF THE BIRDS OF CEYLON Legge (1880), *Garrulax cinereifrons* was first discovered by Dr. Kelaart in 1852, and it is recorded in "Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)", Phillips (1978) that its breeding was then still un-

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known. A total of 132 years have therefore elapsed between the discovery of the species and the first authenticated discovery of its nest and eggs in March/April 1984.

While observing birds in the Morapitiya Forest Reserve, situated adjacent to the Sinharaja Forest, and about 40 miles south-east of Colombo, we discovered the commencement of nest building by *Garrulax cinereifrons* in the undergrowth on a fairly steep hillside carrying some quite tall trees. The discovery was made at about 8.30 a.m. on the 25th March, 1984. The first indication of possible nest building was when one bird was seen to pick up a large dead leaf from the ground and fly away with it. By careful observation, a succession of birds were found to be depositing the leaves, and a few twigs, in a fork of a small sapling, and about 15 ft from ground level. The rapidity with which the birds arrived to make a deposit suggested that, perhaps, the whole flock might contribute towards construction, and this was indicated when three birds made a leaf deposit within a space of less than 60 seconds.

The nest, commenced in the morning of 25th March, was probably completed by the end of the month, and the first egg was probably laid on or about the 1st April because, when we returned to the forest and looked into the nest at 11.00 a.m. on the 3rd April, using a mirror fastened to a long pole, and a pair of binoculars, Mrs. Judy Banks obtained a "first sight" of three turquoise blue eggs. The colour and number of eggs were subsequently confirmed by Dr. T. S. U. de Zylva (at that time President of the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka) who

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also later succeeded in measuring one egg at 25×18 mm. The blue eggs of this endemic species probably places it in the *Garrulax* genus.

In the construction of the nest, the birds had deposited an untidy mass of leaves and twigs in the fork of the tree to form a base the size of a football, and the nest cup was set into the top of that mass. The inner diameter of the cup was $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches and it was largely constructed of pliable twigs, rootlets and horse-hair lichen with a few *Cullinia ceylonica* leaves at the base — probably part of the leafy foundations (which were not recovered when the nest was collected).

It was not possible to keep the nest under constant observation due to other commitments, but brooding appeared to commence in the late evening of the 3rd April and when the nest was next visited on the 19th April, it was found to contain only one newly hatched chick. The other two eggs or chicks were absent and are presumed to have been predated. The visit of 19th April was immediately followed by a period of heavy rains which flooded and damaged approach roads, but a Land Rover finally succeeded in getting through to the nest site on the 24th April. The nest was found to be empty and it can only be assumed that the third chick had been predated. The nest was collected and has been lodged at the National Museum, Colombo.

We acknowledge, with grateful thanks, the information contributed by Dr. T.S.U. de Zylva, and we also thank Dr. W. S. Kotagama for assisting in the identification of the materials used in the construction of the nest, and for assistance in finalising these notes.

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15. SEPARATION IN THE HAND OF WHITEBROWED BLUE FLYCATCHER *MUSCICAPA SUPERCILIARIS* AND SLATY BLUE FLYCATCHER *MUSCICAPA LEUCOMELANURA*

Familiarity with these two species allows easy separation but until that familiarity is acquired, the problem of identifying females and first year birds can be a tricky one exacerbated by two factors. The first is the lack of illustrations of the birds except of breeding plumage adults — for example Ali and Ripley (1983), Ali, Ripley and Dick (1983) and Fleming, Fleming and Bangdel (1979). The second is that the key in Ali and Ripley (1983) can be difficult or confusing to use. For example, part of key suggests the third primary equals the fourth in *M. superciliaris* and that the third is shorter than the fourth in *M. leucomelanura*. While ringing at Haigam Rakh, Kashmir in September 1984, two first year *M. superciliaris* were caught — one male and one female. In both specimens the third primary was 1 mm shorter than the fourth.

To confirm the identification and to look for a sure way of separating the two species, an examination was made of the skins in the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, England. A total of 47 *M. superciliaris* and 20 *M. leucomelanura* was examined. Birds collected between June and September were ignored because of the possibility of the presence of not quite fully grown primaries.

Comparison of the third and fourth primaries

produced the following.

M. superciliaris:

- 3rd primary = 4th primary: 34%
 3rd primary shorter than 4th: 63.8%
 3rd primary longer than 4th: 2.1%

M. leucomelanura

- 3rd primary shorter than 4th: 100%

The two species can however be separated by wing point, i.e. the longest primary. Figures in brackets refer to the number of birds.

M. superciliaris — wing point is between 3rd and 4th/5th primaries as follows on the skins examined:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| wing point = 3rd primary | (1) |
| 3rd and 4th primaries | (14) |
| 3rd, 4th and 5th primaries | (2) |
| 4th primary | (28) |
| 4th and 5th primaries | (2) |

Thus 89.4% of the birds had a wing point of either the 3rd and 4th primaries or the 4th primary.

M. leucomelanura — wing point is either the 5th primary (15) or 5th and 6th (5).

When the 3rd primary is shorter than the 4th, the two species can still be separated by measuring the difference.

M. superciliaris — range: 0.5-2.5 mm.
 mean: 0.82 mm.

M. leucomelanura — range: 2.5-4.0 mm.
 mean: 3.03 mm.